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ABSTRACT

Trends in college enrollment patterns, along with reference to the historical development of the university, are considered, and the university's response to population shifts and the role of life-span development in that response are addressed. It is proposed that the response of higher education to declining number of youth should not be simple or superficial (e.g., to attempt to recruit larger numbers of young adults for part-time enrollments, or to attempt to reorient emphases toward more research and service and less teaching). It is suggested that these types of changes do not alter the university's fundamental age-segmented mentality, a concept with pervasive theoretical and methodological implications. It is proposed that the current momentum may become the opportunity for a basic reorientation toward life-span development. This reorientation would help resolve some of the enrollment problems because of the greater growth of the numbers of older (35 or 40 and older) adults; but, more importantly, would supplant the existent normative, universal, age-segmented model of development with one sensitive to differential processes of development, characterized by interindividual and intraindividual variability, multidimensionality, and multidirectionality of expression. It is claimed that the life-span development model could vitalize university research, service and education, especially among those units most vulnerable to budgetary cuts. Among the areas in need of interdisciplinary investigation by educators, physical educators and recreators, and behavioral and social scientists are the following: normative adult transitions, time and leisure, life-span learning, learning and memory, individual counseling, and industrial counseling. (SW)

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The University, Declining Enrollments,
and Life-Span Development

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THE UNIVERSITY, DECLINING ENROLLMENTS,
AND LIFE-SPAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Declining numbers of youth, presently being experienced by most industrialized nations, have precipitated some self-examination for the university. The focus of the university is changing in response to population shifts, as it has in response to past socio-economic or cultural conditions.

This paper proposes that this momentum to change should not be simple or superficial; e.g., to attempt to recruit larger numbers of young adults for part-time enrollments, or to attempt to re-orient emphases toward more research and service and less teaching; for these changes do not alter the university's fundamental age-segmented mentality, a concept with pervasive theoretical and methodological implications. This paper proposes that the current momentum become the opportunity for a basic re-orientation toward life-span development. This reorientation would help resolve some of the enrollment problems because of the greater growth of the numbers of older (35 or 40+) adults; but, more importantly, would supplant the existent normative, universal, age-segmented model of development with one sensitive to differential processes of development, characterized by interindividual and intraindividual variability, multidimensionality and multidirectionality of expression. The life-span development model could vitalize university research, service and education, especially among those units most vulnerable to budgetary cuts.

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The focus of the university is changing, as it has regularly in the past, and with this change in focus may come a fundamental redefinition of higher education itself. The focal point of the university for millenia has been youth. While concepts, methodologies, subject matters and the socio-economics of the university have changed periodically through history, one element has remained constant: youth.

The earliest concept of the university, for example, was of a privileged opportunity for learned discourse. Young Greek and Roman men learned, through didactic and Socratic methods, from older masters. Learning was appropriate for youth for, as Virgil concluded, "Age carries all things, even the mind, away."

The university in the Middle Ages in some ways merely elaborated upon the Greek concept. The Platonian model of education, that truth lies inside, formed the foundation. The quadrivium and trivium, curricula to help one reason and argue, became the pillars. To the earlier concept of privileged opportunity was added the dimension of cloister.

The university of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries became more empirical, with greater emphases upon observation and measurement methodologies. But other characteristics of the earlier universities remained, even intensified; social class determined the education of young men for whom education became a perquisite. Older adulthood, stated to be a period of decline, was deemed beyond the pale of this higher education. Lord Byron

observed, "Heaven gives its favorites early death."

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries expanded the concept of the university to personal and professional (vocational) development and broadened methodologies to reflect awareness of individual differences. It became somewhat less elitist and more egalitarian, even to the point of educating women. While the concept of the university as cloister began to erode, the orientation toward youth endured. Seemingly endless waves of available youth nourished this orientation, and, parenthetically, supported the cloister concept to some degree; for youth involved in the life-stage task of leaving home found the university enclave an attractive first step.

Today some self-feeding arguments still serve to support the university's youth orientation. One is the premise that the proper function of the university, indeed of higher education generally, is to prepare people to do something, equating higher education with vocational skill preparation or, more commonly, with development of the person to be a better producer. As Withall (1974) observes, "Our educative enterprise, at all levels, seems geared less to the cultivation of human beings and their humanity as ends in themselves, and geared more to nurturing people as means to production of goods and services." Another argument is that the university's proper function is to prepare people to be something, equating higher education with no less than the full development of the individual, sometimes horizontally, as in the broad classical education, sometimes vertically as in thorough training in a particular discipline.

These premises tend to have the net effect of reinforcing the association of the university and the years, 18 to 30 or 35. As Ansello and Hayslip (1979) note,

"Supporters of the first position point out that older adults have occupied vocational positions for some time and that, if older adults seek education to aid vocational transitions, the return on the educational investment in subsequent production would seem small. This argument has, until recently, kept large numbers of older adults away, especially from professional schools. Holders of the second position assert that the period for maximizing human potential occurs early in life, in the adolescent years, according to some, in the twenties or early thirties according to others. Regardless, the older adult is thought to be beyond the period of optimum intellectual functioning."

The assumptions of decelerating or negative mental growth after adolescence have supported the university's youth orientation and have been major impediments to an adult orientation in higher education. Universities have been unable to "overcome their own static view of themselves as enclaves reserved largely for post-adolescent resident students to be visited for brief and rigidly defined periods of time" (Hechinger, 1975). Witness the direction of educational growth in the United States. In 1910, 15% of all 14 - 17 year olds attended school; by 1943, 64%, and by 1979, 95% of this group were in school (Omang, 1979). Adult participation in all phases of higher education has remained steadily low over these years (Christoffel, 1977).

The university, and higher education in general, is clearly age-segmented. Recent demographic changes, population shifts, have threatened this mentality, however. In the United States, according to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, the numbers of high school graduates will drop dramatically between 1979-1995: down 31-59% in 12 states and the District of Columbia, down 17-28% in another 14 states, and down 2-15% in an additional 14 states. Only 10 states, primarily in the Sun Belt, will show any increments at all (Magarrell, 1980). The U. S. National Center for Educational Statistics projects, consequently, a drop from 1979 levels of 9.3% in full-time higher education enrollments just by 1988.

Colleges and universities have begun to advertise more extensively,

have expanded recruitment teams, and have even hired public relations firms to improve their images--all to attract more students (Lindsey, 1978; Omang, 1979). The near-panic reflects the age-segmented mentality of higher education.

Nor is the American experience unique. The U. S. figure of approximately 77% of its population being over age 15 (Bureau of the Census, 1976), is met or exceeded by the figures for Canada, Japan, U.S.S.R., and every country of Europe and Oceania (UNESCO, 1975). A major contributing factor, of course, is the drift toward Zero Population Growth of most industrialized countries. Day (1978) lists the following 26 countries at or approaching ZPG through low fertility, as of May 1978:

Australia	Germany, West	Poland
Austria	Greece	Singapore
Belgium	Hungary	Sweden
Bulgaria	Italy	Switzerland
Canada	Japan	United Kingdom
Denmark	Luxembourg	United States
Finland	Malta	U.S.S.R.
France	Netherlands	Yugoslavia
Germany, East	Norway	

This drift toward ZPG seems rather well-established and unlikely to abate. Even were it to reverse itself miraculously, it would take a decade or two for the changes to be felt by the university.

Attempts to recruit more students seem to be rather myopic, if the orientation of the university remains age-segmented. Even a surge in part-time enrollments by young adults can compensate only partially for the loss of youth attendant upon the trend toward ZPG. The increasingly prevalent claims that declining enrollments will mean "institutional excellence" (Magarrell, 1980), because of lowered faculty-student ratios or because of greater freedom to conduct research (given fewer classroom obligations), ignore several contemporary realities: in inflationary times a retrenchment mentality exists among taxpayers; education, being clearly age-segmented and youth-oriented, becomes a

prime candidate for support cuts as the public has fewer and fewer children and, hence, less vested interest in supporting educational structures; governmental funding sources have enshrined the "numbers game," i.e., the cost-benefit ratio, and are likely to re-orient themselves suddenly from "quantity" to "quality" in higher education. Attempts at achieving institutional excellence which depend upon the university's maintaining its past orientation to mission and curricula are not likely to succeed. Past orientations are toward youth. Future growth is adult-oriented.

The university must not ignore the tremendous opportunities population shifts afford it. Opening its doors to adult students, a fundamental and enormous redefinition of self for the university, would help resolve the numbers game. But a larger opportunity presents itself as well: to expand the focus of higher education to the whole life span.

In the first instance, the adult cohorts, especially those of older adults, are the fastest growing segments of the population in industrialized nations. For example, while the present total population of the United States is approximately three times its 1900 figure, those age 45+ are about five times their number in 1900, age 55+ six and a half times and age 65+ almost eight times the numbers of their counterparts in 1900. The decade of the 1980's will see increases in the number of 25-44 year olds and 45-54 year old of 25.5% and 11.4% respectively. Almost one third of all Americans are over age 45 (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1976). Similar figures obtain for most industrialized nations. Moreover, trends toward early retirement in good health mean still another group of potential students. Between 1947-72 the percentage of American men aged 55-64 who were retired almost doubled, rising from 10.4% of the cohort to 19.5% (Parnes and Nestel, 1975). More recent data

show that between 1960-80 percentage-of-cohort-retired figures have gone from 19.8% to 37.0% for 60-64 year olds, and from 53.2% to 70.1% for those 65-69 years (Torrey, 1979).

Pointedly, ever larger proportions of successive cohorts have satisfied a basic prerequisite for university attendance, completion of secondary school. In the U.S. approximately 37% of those over age 65 have finished high school. Median levels of education both for those 55-64 years (cohorts of 1916-25) and those 45-54 years (cohorts of 1926-35) are over 12 years (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1978).

In the second instance, expanding the focus of higher education to one that is life-span developmental opens whole new vistas of theoretical and methodological investigations; challenges some fundamental principles of "understanding" behavior; provides invigorating dialectic within the university; and helps to identify interrelationships among developmental processes, and varieties of patterns or sequences of development rather than normative-universal, age-segmented patterns of development. With regard to behavior-change development, for example, traditional theoretical and methodological approaches have ignored ontogenetic (individual) changes, showing a lack of concern for biocultural context of the individual's development, in favor of models of development emphasizing a) intraorganismic sources, with little reference to external, environmental influences; b) normative, universal patterns (influenced largely by genetic, maturational factors); and c) static cultural context, with scant attention to macro-level cultural changes (Baltes and Willis, 1978).

The university seems tied to the traditional concept of human development, which in turn, is heavily tied to maturational processes, and assumes a

normative, universal socialization sequence producing regularities in ontogenetic development. This concept of human development is the traditional concept of child development. Baltes and Willis (1978) suggest that science-irrelevant factors, such as the child-oriented features of Western societies, and attendant political considerations such as funding mechanisms, restricted the focus of development to the child, and frustrated the earlier (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) life-span orientation of the behavioral sciences. The predominance in numbers of youth in the population likely also contributed.

Tying expectations for behavior, especially cognitive behavior, to intra-organismic-maturational variables meant simply that behaviors of those maturing would be characterized by growth, while behaviors of those matured would be characterized by stability or decline. Apparently each society has a system of social expectations for age-appropriate behavior which is internalized (Neugarten and Datan, 1973; Kimmel, 1974). The programmatic implications for the university are obvious.

To the degree that inappropriate belief systems, and faulty research data pervade our "understanding" of middle- and older-adulthood, restrictive age stereotypes prevent life-span human development. So pervasive is the expectation that aging means loss that it operates at a higher level than that of "theory." The association transcends theory. It is an element of what Kuhn (1970) calls a "mentality," the composite of a culture's belief systems. The university must acknowledge its involvement in these restrictions by commission (being a youth-oriented enclave) and by omission (failing to address life-span development considerations).

As mentioned, in the past behavioral development was seen similarly to the biologist's concept of development, as a fairly unitary process of change which was unidirectional, sequential, irreversible, normative and endstate-

oriented (e.g., maturity). This led, among other things, to expectations of decline in adulthood, to misdirected research, to premature conclusions about age-segmented ability. Introducing a life-span developmental concept into higher education focuses attention on differential processes of development, where there is interindividual and intraindividual variability, multidimensionality, and multidirectionality of development. As Baltes and Willis (1978) note, in the life-span development orientation one acknowledges discontinuity (behavioral changes are not necessarily "simple cumulations along an invariant continuum of measurement"); life-course grading (behavior-change processes begin and end at times other than birth and death); and the interaction of age-graded (biological and environmental determinants highly correlated with chronological age), history-graded (normative-universal event patterns drawn from an historical time, i.e., cohort effects), and non-normative influences in the complexity of multidimensional, multidirectional, plastic life-span development.

A life-span development orientation put into practice in the university in higher education, could vitalize research, service, and education. Not only does this orientation open new areas of the life continuum for investigation, e. g., mid-life and old age, but it also seeks interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary, i.e., biocultural, perspectives and ontogenetic linkages across age specialties in attempting to understand the developmental behavior-change processes of human existence. In short, a commitment to life-span development is a commitment to teaching, service, and research, irrespective of the age of the subject or the recipient.

Already there are proposals that, as enrollments decline, the university must "complement" its teaching roles with vigorous research and service roles-- a re-orientation, with new emphases (Magarrell, 1980). These advocates only

brush the point. If there's to be re-orientation in the impending transition period toward greater research and service, it should be toward life-span research and service. For that matter re-orientation toward research and service emphases is not so important as expansion of existent teaching, research and service priorities across the life-span.

Some cases present themselves. The Chronicle of Higher Education (1980) reports that education, physical education/recreation and social-behavioral science units are apparently among the prime candidates in the United States for budgetary cuts and retrenchment in the 1980's. These are the very units likely to make the most immediate impacts upon our understanding of the middle and later parts of the life-span. These units could assume the forefront in the university's reorientation toward life-span development. Consider the following areas in need of interdisciplinary investigation by educators, physical educators and recreators, and behavioral and social scientists, among others:

(a) normative adult transitions. Despite ontogenetic-individual differences in behavior-change development, are there predictable, universal transitions most people pass through? If so, are these transitions tied to chronological age (Levinson et al, 1977, 1978) or to social-life stage (Neugarten, 1968; Lowenthal et al, 1975)? Are inter-sex differences in adjustment to transitions greater than intra-sex differences (Lipman-Blumen, 1972, 1977)? What roles do confidants and the life review (Butler, 1975) play in reprioritization of mid-life? Are these phenomena culture-specific or cross-cultural?

(b) time and leisure. With more people retiring earlier in life, there is more need to understand the illusive phenomena of time. Do we need to re-discover leisure? What role do activities play in perceived morale,

in life-satisfaction and longevity? Do cross-cultural differences in the perception of time predict differential life satisfaction? People are able to place themselves at some imaginary point in the life-line, the continuum of one's own time. What influences do these self-perceptions have upon personal or professional growth, marital or vocational relationships, opinions of capability or self-worth?

(c) life-span learning. How do expectations affect cognitive functions? Are differences in learning and intellectual abilities with age cohort-specific?; do they reflect socio-cultural influences or physiological decrement? Is intelligence age-segmented? Why do global intelligence measures evaluate knowledge and skills appropriate to specific age-segments rather than assessing the individual's changing understanding of the same concept across developmental periods (Baltes and Willis, 1978)? Is cognitive growth tied to biological maturation? Is adult development monotonic, saltatory or dialectical? Is cognitive functioning in old age modifiable?

(d) learning and memory. If greater numbers of adults are to be involved in the missions of the university, can they learn and retain information as well as their traditional-aged (18-30) counterparts? Should the task of the university be to intervene, to relieve "relative deprivation," to make older students learn more in the manner of those younger (Hultsch, 1974)? Why do older adults in contrast to younger adults tend not to organize material spontaneously when initially learning it (Hulicka and Grossman, 1967)? Can adult performance be improved through teaching mnemonic devices, such as the method of loci (Robertson-Tchabo et al, 1976), learning strategies, and self-instructional training (Meichenbaum, 1974)?

(e) individual counseling. Adult transitions often occur without community support or understanding, amidst individual feelings of aloneness. Some, like retirement and widowhood, occur to the majority of specific populations. Yet we do not know much about normative-universal retirement and loss phenomena and even less about ontogenetic-individual variations. Retirement is essentially a post-World War II experience. How can one prepare for retirement? What behavioral and social adjustments does it create for the marital bond, for the definition of self? The average wife can expect to outlive her husband in all industrialized nations. What social structures help most in coping with the differential stages of loss? What happens to the individual when loss (or retirement) occurs "off-time," at an "inappropriate" age in life? Other transitions occur less frequently but still warrant the university's cross-disciplinary attention. For example, one of every nine adults living to later life becomes severely visually impaired, and there are similar statistics for hearing, physical and emotional disabilities (Schloss, 1978). What needs have they for educational, vocational, and personal counseling?

(f) industrial counseling. Aging industrialized nations mean aging work forces. How effectively can adult workers be retrained? With increasing technological and informational demands placed upon several professions, it becomes increasingly likely to see mid-life career shifts from professional specialist to professional generalist; for example, engineers and doctors going from practice to administrative or teaching roles. What information do employers need to have to make decisions about mid-life job entrants, about multiple career applicants? Are there differential adjustments by sex to on-the-job stress, differential cognitive abilities between older adult men and women that are job-significant?

In these and countless more areas the questions far outnumber the answers. Some questions have lain outside of the age-segmented direction of the university. Some partial answers have remained within disciplinary confines of the university.

Again, these observations seem to transcend national boundaries. Population shifts are being experienced by virtually every industrialized country. These alternations should necessitate introspective analyses of the university's youth orientation. The university can attempt to augment declining full-time enrollments by youth with larger part-time enrollments by young adults. This would sidestep confrontation with the issue of its age-segmented mentality. However, the university would miss the rich opportunity to expand its focus to full life-span development. A life-span developmental orientation would precipitate a vitalization of all three of the university's primary missions of teaching, research and service, with students and the subject matter being drawn from across the life-span. We must reassess our cherished definitions of higher education, of the university, in part because we are being forced to by demographic changes. Yet these changes may precipitate a most fortunate reorientation.

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